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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000731

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: SWAYING THE DUTCH

REF: A. STATE 124188
[1](#)B. USNATO 563
[1](#)C. THE HAGUE 726
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Classified By: Pol Deputy Eric G. Falls for reasons 1.4(b,d)
[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: All evidence suggests the Dutch will
not/not retain a significant number of troops in Uruzgan, and
the coalition government could fall over this issue. Pushing
the government to collapse on this matter is not in our
interest. Accepting Dutch compromise proposals is to our
advantage. END SUMMARY.
DUTCH LEAVING URUZGAN

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Ambassador pressed Development Minister Bert
Koenders (Labor Party) to retain a Dutch military
contribution in Afghanistan in a meeting December 4. Koenders
observed that the pressure after the President,s speech is
logical. He gave no insights that have not been in his
recent, public statements. Koenders repeated that there will
be no Dutch troops in Uruzgan after 2010 and flatly stated
the Dutch would also not lead the PRT in Uruzgan. However,
he did acknowledge that it is important for the Netherlands
to continue to do its part for NATO and said there were

"discussions" within the cabinet on committing Dutch troops elsewhere in southern Afghanistan.

13. (S/NF) D/PM / Finance Minister / Labor Party leader Wouter Bos recently declined a requested meeting with Ambassador Levin to discuss Afghanistan. He referred the Ambassador instead to Koenders, Bos's primary adviser on Afghanistan. In all public statements during the past several months, and repeated publicly as recently as two days ago, just after President Obama's speech, Bos has consistently stated the Dutch will leave Uruzgan in 2010.

14. (S/NF) Even Ministers that support continued involvement in Afghanistan at the most aggressive level have been clear about this basic point. FM Verhagen stated "the U.S. knows that we will hand over the lead in Uruzgan" in 2010.

15. (S/NF) Comment: The Labor Party has left no room for their own maneuvering on pulling everyone out of Uruzgan except for a few (12) development personnel. We expect the Labor Party could well bring down the government rather than extend the Uruzgan mission. The Labor Party's "bread and butter" is the economy, but the party is looking for an out to rally their rank and file. The Labor Party's poll numbers have been low for months, suggesting a steep loss of seats in a near-term election. Accompanying this poor performance has been criticism of Bos's leadership and his willingness to flip flop. We expect that rather than reverse course again and support a robust Uruzgan mission, Bos would opt to pull out of the coalition and campaign on Afghanistan. End Comment.

GOVERNMENT COLLAPSE NOT IN OUR INTEREST

16. (S/NF) A collapse of the government hurts our chances for Dutch contributions and would delay any prospective Dutch contributions.

17. (S/NF) A collapse hurts our chances for significant Dutch military contributions. If Labor pulls the plug on the governing coalition at this time, it would likely make Afghanistan one of the central campaign issues. Dutch public support for the mission continues at a low level (33% as of October 30), suggesting that advocates for a deployment will lose seats in parliament. On the other hand, Geert Wilders' Qlose seats in parliament. On the other hand, Geert Wilders' far-right, isolationist Freedom Party stands to gain significant seats in parliament. In turn, a new governing coalition will likely be forced to include more parties to reach a majority. It's likely the coalition could shift to the left and include parties who are likely to oppose deployment after the elections' "referendum on Afghanistan."

18. (S/NF) A collapse of the government will delay additional Dutch contributions. New elections and the formation of a new government will take 5-10 months, possibly longer due to Wilders' popularity and the corresponding difficulty in forming a new government. Until the new government is

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formed, the caretaker government would not be able to approve a new military mission. Considering that Dutch troops are scheduled to depart this summer, as well as the planning required for an extension, withdrawal from Uruzgan will proceed as scheduled and a new deployment could easily be delayed until 2011.

ACCEPTING DUTCH PROPOSALS IS TO OUR ADVANTAGE

19. (S/NF) The new Dutch proposal -- maintaining a civilian PRT with protection by another ally, plus troops elsewhere in southern Afghanistan -- is better than waiting for a new coalition government that might not give us anything more, and could well give us less. Embassy counsels patience, deference and openness with Dutch government's efforts to sustain their Afghanistan deployment. PM Balkenende's consistent support for the Afghanistan mission and his success in leading his party to four consecutive wins in national elections give us confidence. We recommend deferring to the advice of Balkenende's National Security Adviser on not publicly pressuring the Dutch on Afghanistan.

LEVIN